Complementizers and assertive predicates: A window into their syntax and pragmatics

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Introduction: Since Hooper and Thompson (1973) – H&T henceforth, both the syntax and pragmatics of so called assertive predicates have been topics of much debate. H&T establish a correlation between the grammaticality of root phenomena in embedded clauses and their assertive interpretation. Crosslinguistically, this correlation has been extended to explain other types of root phenomena (e.g., V2 in Germanic languages, cf. Heycock 2006 for an overview). Drawing on data from Spanish, Asturian and English, I show that assertive predicates differ syntactically from other kinds of predicates in the left-peripheral constructions that the selected embedded clause may license. As it is shown in (1) embedded CPs selected by this class of predicates license Hanging Topics (HT), Left-Dislocated Topics (LD) and Focus constituents. Further, these predicates may also select a complement clause that doesn’t exhibit any left-peripheral construction, as in (2).

Analysis: Assuming a cartographic approach to the CP (cf. Benincà and Poletto 2004), I argue that assertive predicates may select two kinds of sentential complements: they may select a sentential CP headed by either Forceº, or by Finitenessº (Finº). Extending Demonte and Fernández Soriano’s (2009) analysis of the complementizer system in Spanish to English and Asturian, I contend that these languages have two homophonous que “that” complementizers mapped in two different heads in the left-periphery, namely que 1 “that 1” mapped in Forceº and que 2 “that 2” in Finitenessº (Finº), as depicted in (4). With the different positions that these complementizers may occupy in the structure in (4), the grammaticality of the different left-peripheral constructions shown in (1) can be explained as follows. If the assertive matrix predicate dice “he says” or cree “he believes” selects Forceº mapped as que 1 “that 1”, this selection is predicted to be compatible with HT(cf. (1a)), with LD (see (1b)), and with Focalized constituents (in (1c)). In turn, if Finº mapped as que 2 “that 2” is selected, the analysis I propose predicts that this selection is incompatible with the left-peripheral constructions shown in (1), thus generating a sentence as that in (2).

Predictions and further evidence: Speakers report that sentences as those in (1) give rise to a presupposition that marks the content of the embedded clause as part of the belief state of the matrix predicate’s subject, what I call a [+conviction] pragmatic interpretation. Evidence for this interpretation is given in (4), which shows that a fragment as that in brackets cancelling this presupposition is pragmatically odd. On the other hand, for a sentence as that in (2), speakers report that no presupposition is detected, which entails a [-conviction] interpretation in our terms, and thus the fragment in brackets in (5) is pragmatically fine – cf. (4). Under the analysis I propose, these interpretation differences can be naturally explained. I argue that selection of Forceº and que 1 “that 1” correlates with a [+conviction] interpretation, while selection of Finº and que 2 “that 2” with a [-conviction] interpretation, which explains the noted interpretation differences between (4) and (5). In turn, the (un)availability of left-peripheral material easily follows, ultimately depending on whether Forceº or Finº is selected. Further evidence for the analysis I propose comes from German and from Asturian. Embedded clauses selected by assertive predicates in these languages also exhibit root phenomena, namely V2 and enclisis respectively – see (6) and (7). Assuming that V2 in German and enclisis in Asturian arise as a result of Tº-to-Finº movement, these data may be easily captured. saidi “she said” and digo “I say” may select Forceº or Finº. Selection of Forceº is mapped as a zero-complementizer (in German) or a que 1 “that 1” (in Asturian), and Tº-to-Finº can uniformly explain the V2 in German and the enclisis in Asturian (cf. (6a) and (7a)). If Finº is selected, daß “that” and que 2 “that 2” merged in Finº block verb movement, which explains the verb-final and the proclisis in German and Asturian respectively (see (6b).
and (7b). Finally, this analysis also predicts the interpretation differences between enclisis and proclisis in Asturian in (8), which ultimately depend on the selection of Force\(^e\) or of Fin\(^e\).

**Data**

(1) a. Julio dice/cree [que Ramón\(_3\), todos confían en él,] \(HT = \checkmark\)
   
   Julio say\(_{3SG}\)/believe\(_{3SG}\) that Ramón all trust\(_{3PL\IND}\) in him
   
   "Julio says/believes that Ramón, everybody trusts him,"
   
   b. Julio dice/cree [que a María, la\(_1\) dejó Luis] \(LD = \checkmark\)
   
   Julio say\(_{3SG}\)/believe\(_{3SG}\) that to María her\(_{CL}\) left\(_{3SG\IND}\) Luis
   
   "Julio says/believes that María, Luis left her,"
   
   c. Julio dice/cree [que A MÁRIA (y no a Marta) dejó Luis] \(Focus = \checkmark\)
   
   Julio say\(_{3SG}\)/believe\(_{3SG}\) that to María and not to Marta left\(_{3SG\IND}\) Luis
   
   "Julio says/believes that it was María that Luis left (, and not Marta)"

(2) Julio dice/cree [que la dejó Luis] Julio say\(_{3SG}\)/believe\(_{3SG}\) that her\(_{CL}\) left\(_{3SG\IND}\) Luis
   
   "Julio says/believes that Luis left her"

(3) \([\text{[Forec]} \text{que1/that1} [\text{[H Topic]} HT^\circ [\text{[Left-DislocatedP LD}^\circ [\text{[Focus} Foc^\circ [\text{[FinP que2/that2} [\text{[TP T}^\circ \ldots ]]]]])]]]\)

(4) Julio dice/cree que a María, la\(_1\) dejó Luis [, \#pero no está seguro]
   
   Julio say\(_{3SG}\)/believe\(_{3SG}\) that to María her\(_{CL}\) left\(_{3SG\IND}\) Luis but not is sure
   
   "Julio says/believes that María, Luis left her, [\#but he is not sure (whether that’s true)]"

(5) Julio dice/cree que la dejó Luis [, pero no está seguro]
   
   Julio say\(_{3SG}\)/believe\(_{3SG}\) that her\(_{CL}\) left\(_{3SG\IND}\) Luis
   
   "Julio says/believes that Luis left her, [but he is not sure (whether that’s true)]"

(6) a. Sie sagte, sie wolle keine Bücher kaufen 
   
   she said she wants no books buy
   
   "She said (that) she didn’t want to buy any books"

(7) a. Digo qu’ayúdame [Asturian]
   
   say\(_{1SG}\) that-help\(_{3SG\hspace{0.2em}me\hspace{0.2em}CL}\)
   
   b. Digo que me ayuda
   
   say\(_{1SG}\) that me\(_{CL}\) help\(_{3SG}\) but not am sure
   
   "I say that s/he helps me"

(8) a. Digo qu’ayúdame [#\#, pero non ti sei guardu] [Asturian]
   
   say\(_{1SG}\) that-help\(_{3SG\hspace{0.2em}me\hspace{0.2em}CL}\) but not am sure
   
   b. Digo que me ayuda [pero non ti sei guardu]
   
   say\(_{1SG}\) that me\(_{CL}\) help\(_{3SG}\) but not am sure
   
   "I say that s/he helps me, but I’m not sure (whether that’s true)"

**References**